

LESYA UKRAINKA
ADVERSITY TEACHES



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Once upon a time there was a sparrow. And he would have been a fine enough sparrow, except that, unfortunately, he was rather foolish. He hadn't learned a thing from the time he broke out of his egg. He wasn't capable of anything: either of building a nest, or finding a tasty grain to eat; wherever he sat, there he fell asleep—whatever appeared before his eyes, that he ate. One thing about him though, he was very high-spirited—ready to fight for a reason, or for no reason at all.

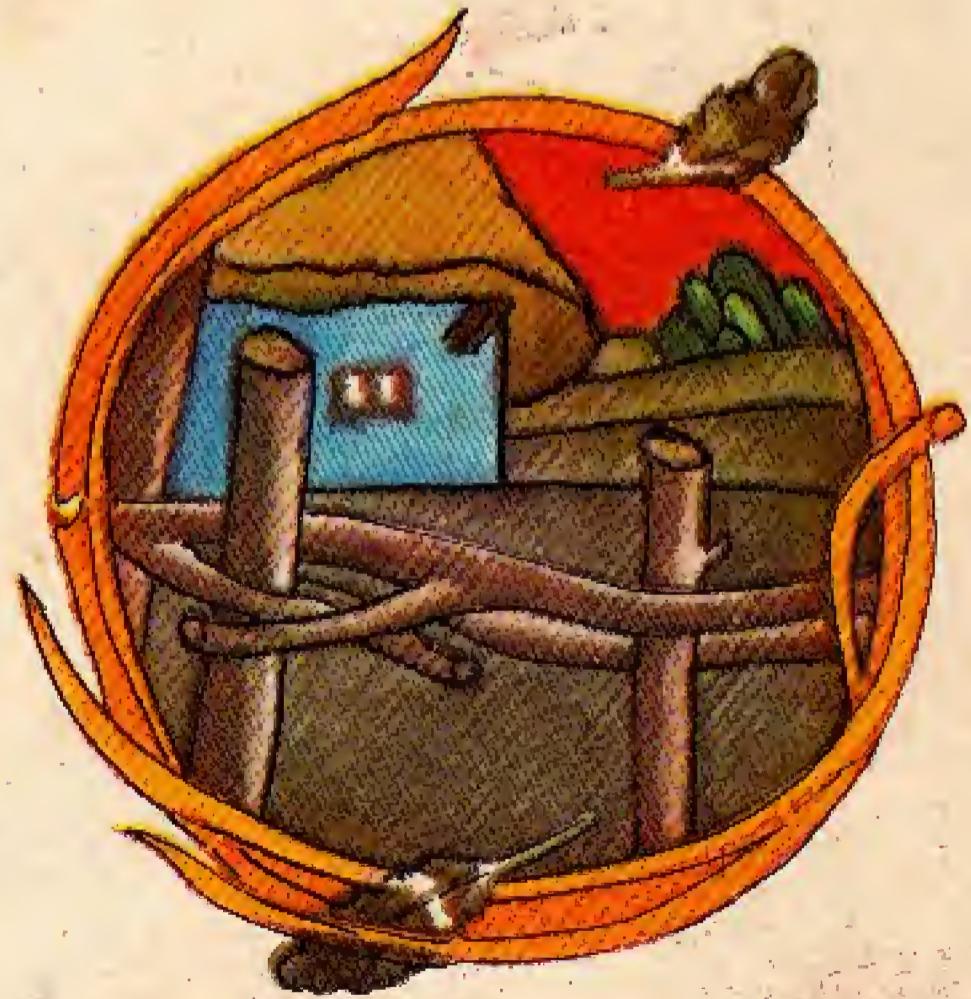
One day he was flying about the yard of a homestead with one of his friends, also a young sparrow. They flew about, playing around the rubbish heap, when they found three seed grains. And here our sparrow said:

"They're my seeds, I found them!"

But the other, too, chimed in:

"No, they're mine! Mine! Mine!"

And they started to fight. They fought, hopping up and down and plucking at each other so hard that the feathers flew. They fought till they were both tired, then sat facing each other, all puffed up and having forgotten what the fight was all about. Suddenly remembering, they looked about for the seeds. What could have happened to them?





A hen, followed by her chicks, was walking about the yard, clucking:

"Where fools fight, the wise profit; where fools fight, the wise profit!"

"What are you saying?" asked the sparrows.

"Why, I'm thanking you for being so foolish! While you were so stupidly fighting, I fed the seeds you were fighting about to my chicks. What is it they say of someone who's foolish? There was no one to beat you, and teach you! If someone would only take you in hand, you may yet grow up to be sensible birds!.."

The other sparrow grew angry at these words.

"Teach your own children sense, as for me, I have enough for myself!" he chirped angrily, hopped, twitched a wing, and flew off. But our sparrow remained and began to think.

"It's true," he thought, "it's better to be sensible. The hen is sensible, for she has eaten and I'm sitting here, hungry."

He thought and thought some more, then turned to the hen and begged:

"Teach me to be sensible, Madame Hen! You are so wise yourself!"

"Oh, no!" answered the hen. "Excuse me, my dear, but I have enough troubles without



you,—look at my large family, they also have to be taught some sense! Look for other teachers!" And she walked off into the hen-house.

The sparrow was left alone.

"What to do? I'll have to ask someone to help me, because I don't want to live without wisdom!" And he flew up and headed for the woods.

Arriving in the woods, who should he see first but a cuckoo sitting on a snowball-tree, singing out: "Cu-ckoo! Cu-ckoo!"

He went right up to her.

"Auntie, I have a request to make of you. Teach me to be wise! You have no children of your own. I asked the hen, but she told me she had enough troubles already."

"Well, let me tell you!" answered the cuckoo. "If I have no troubles of my own, then why should I take on someone else's. As if I have nothing better to do than teach strange children common sense! That isn't my affair! But if you'd like to know how many years you'll live, that I could tell you."

"As long as you're alive, don't worry about me!" retorted the sparrow, and flew away.

He flew until he came to the swamp, and there he saw the pelican busily catching

frogs. He flew down and timidly approached him:

"Mr. Pelican, teach me to be sensible. You are so wise..."

"What? What? What?" screeched the Pelican. "Be off, you, while you're still alive! I have no use for such as you!.."

The sparrow quickly whirred away, barely breathing from fright.

Looking down, he caught sight of the crow sitting sadly in a ploughed field.

"Auntie," he asked as he joined her, "why are you so worried?"

"I don't know, Sonny, I just don't know!"

"Could you, Auntie, teach me to be wise?"

"No, Sonny, I couldn't. I'm not really sensible myself, so how could I teach anyone else? But if you really want to learn, why don't you go to the owl? They say the owl is very, very wise, and she may be able to give you some advice. I'm not much in the line of wisdom myself. God help me!"

"Good-bye Auntie!" said the sparrow.

"Good luck!"

The sparrow flew about quite a while asking everyone he met where the owl lived. He was told that she lived in the hollow trunk of the dry oak tree. Off he went, and sure enough, there she was, sitting in the





hollow, fast asleep. The sparrow settled on a branch:

"Madame! Are you asleep? Madame! Madame Owl!"

The owl jumped, fluttering her wings rapidly:

"Whoo! What? Who is it?" she hooted, her eyes bulging.

The sparrow was a little frightened himself, but he was a determined little bird.

"It's me, the sparrow..." he said.

"The sparrow? What sparrow? I can't see! What do you want? What kind of evil wind brings you here in the daytime? What a nuisance! They won't even let you sleep during the day..."

And she promptly fell asleep again. The sparrow didn't have the courage to awaken her again, so he sat in the tree and waited for night to come. He waited and waited till he got tired and bored with it all. When it started to get dark, however, the owl awoke and suddenly hooted: "Whoo-oo-oo!.. Whoo-whoo-whoo-oo-oo..." The sparrow turned numb with terror: he wanted to fly away, but held on somehow. The owl came out of the hollow, glanced at the sparrow with such shiny, brilliant eyes that he was frightened all over again.

"What are you doing here?" she hooted.





"Why I, begging your pardon, Ma'am, have been waiting here since morning..."

"What for?"

"Well, until you got up..."

"So. I'm up! What do you want? Speak up!"

"I wanted to ask you, Ma'am, if you would be so kind as to give me lessons in wisdom? You are so wise..."

"He who is born a fool, dies a fool! Run along now, because I'm very hungry!" she hooted, and again her brilliant eyes glowed in the most frightening manner.

The sparrow spurted away quickly, thinking only to hide himself in some bush. There he spent the night. He slept soundly that he woke with a start when he heard a loud "chirr-r-r-r" over his head. Looking up he saw a white-winged magpie sitting on a knotty branch above him, and chirring away with such concentration that her eyes were closed.

"Who is it you're talking to, Miss?" asked the sparrow.

"And what is it to you? Such curiosity! Maybe I'm talking to you!"

"Well, I'm very happy if it's to me. I'd like to beg of you, Miss, to give me lessons in wisdom."

"Now tell me what you need wisdom for,





young man? It's much easier, and certainly much happier, to live in this world without thinking. If I were you, Sonny, I'd sooner learn how to steal, the way I do, and for that you don't need any wisdom. You just listen to me! I'll teach you how to live without wisdom..." the Magpie chirred louder and louder and faster and faster as she offered this advice.

"May you be struck dumb, you talkative bird!" chirped the sparrow. "You've deafened me with your chatter! Away with you!" and he flew quickly away.

Settling down in a field, he paused to think. "Where can I learn to be wise? I've been flying about now for quite a while and can't seem to learn anything. Maybe that's the way it's going to be?" And he sat there, worrying away, looking sadly across the field, where a rook was walking about in his dignified fashion.

"I'll ask him yet," the sparrow brightened up. "But he'll be the last one."

"Teach me to be wise," he asked the rook very directly. "I've been seeking wisdom for a long time, but I can't seem to find it."

"Wisdom, my young friend, doesn't lie about on the roadside," answered the rook with great dignity. "It's not such a simple thing to acquire. But I'll tell you one thing:





if you've never known adversity, you'll never grow wise. Think about it. Now go your way, as I have no time."

The sparrow flew off. "What kind of advice is that?" he thought, sadder than ever. But he didn't ask anyone else to teach him from then on, it was too much. He brooded a little about having to live without wisdom, and then forgot about it. He again turned to hopping about merrily, without a thought.

Time passed so quickly that before the sparrow knew it, summer was gone. Autumn arrived with its cold winds, its stinging rains, and later, with snow flurries. The sparrow was really in trouble—facing hunger and cold! At night, wherever he settled, he couldn't sleep. The wind was so cold it went through him. There was nothing to eat during the day, because everything had been hidden away into the granaries for the winter, and when he did find anything, he lost it through quarreling.

And here is where our sparrow began to acquire wisdom. He decided he must stop quarreling. Wherever his sparrow friends flew, he flew with them; whatever they found to eat he got a share. When he stopped quarreling and fighting they accepted him, when they wouldn't even let him come near them before.





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The sparrow saw how the other birds kept warm in the nests they had built themselves earlier, so he looked closely to see how the nests had been built. He started to collect feather after feather, straw after straw, weaving one after another into a nest for himself. He tried and worked so hard that some of the birds began to respect him. Whenever they met in council, he was called, and his ideas were listened to with great attention. He lived through the winter successfully, and by spring he had grown into a wise and sensible sparrow. He no longer sat in his nest by himself, he now had a mate, and four little eggs nestled in the nest. Soon he was raising a family and had more responsibility — the baby sparrows had to be fed, taught to fly and defended from enemies. There was no time to play about. His neighbours could not get over his good sense and wisdom and often asked him:

"Mr. Sparrow, you are so clever and wise, where on earth did you learn all this?"

And he, when asked, would only nod his head. "Adversity teaches!" he'd say.





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